

Jamaican group protests delay in okaying centre

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Approval of a plan to convert a North York warehouse into the new headquarters of Canada's largest Jamaican cultural organization is being unreasonably delayed, the group's president charges.

And the motives are purely political, says an angry Herman Stewart, head of the 2,000-member Jamaican-Canadian Association.

"It's disgusting that the (North York) planning committee stalled another two months, even after city staff recommended our proposal should be approved," Stewart said yesterday.

He said he's considering taking the fight to the Ontario Municipal Board.

The association filed a rezoning application with the city nine months ago so it could use part of its building on Arrow Rd., in a west-end industrial area, as its headquarters and community centre.

Without waiting for the approval, the group sold its old centre on Dupont St. and has been without a home. As a result, Stewart said, it is spending thousands of dollars to rent facilities for its functions.

PARKING SPACES

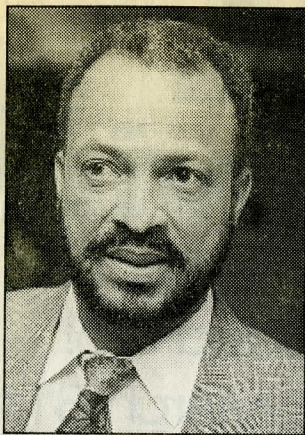
Stewart asked the planning committee yesterday to call a public hearing on the proposal in four weeks so approval could be granted and construction begin without further delay.

A report from city staff said that although the club use is in line with the official plan, 73 parking spaces are needed while the property has only 55.

Eleven area business people have signed a petition opposing the rezoning because of "an extensive conflict with parking," the planning committee was told yesterday.

Councillor George Mammoliti insisted the association provide written proof that the 18 needed parking spaces could be leased off-site. Without that guarantee, he said, he couldn't support the rezoning.

"I'm not opposed to the



HERMAN STEWART: Says politicians stalling to garner votes.

JCA community centre — I think it's a great idea — but the fact remains there's a huge parking problem in that area," Mammoliti said in an interview.

"This is not a political tactic (to garner votes from area businesses). As the councillor, I have to deal with parking concerns because they're legitimate."

WRITTEN COMMITMENT

Cars from a local banquet hall, strip club and neighboring church are often parked illegally on private property or blocking driveways, he added.

The planning committee decided to hold a public meeting in eight weeks to give the group extra time to find more parking, although Stewart told them he's already nailed down a deal.

"I have a written commitment, but no one told me I should bring proof to the committee," he said.

Outside the meeting, Stewart charged that some politicians were "playing games" to stall the project until after the next municipal election, thus satisfying the plan's opponents and securing their votes.

Bernie Farber, spokesperson for the Canadian Jewish Congress, said delaying the public hearing is "nothing more than political shenanigans."

He said in an interview, "The JCA has said it can meet parking requirements. There's no reason to delay."